THE GAME CONTINUES – CHESS IN THE ART OF

SAMUEL BAK

PUCKER GALLERY

any of the material advantages that came with being considered a member of the elite. He dedicated his time to the needs of the community. He served as a judge of an inner tribunal that investigated allegations of collaboration with the Nazis. It was a difficult task. Those were years of great distress and the traumatized survivors walked around with open wounds. Too often, when one heard people yell at each other "KAPO!," Pandemonium would follow.

Markusha's public person inspired trust and respect. His private person was very different. He was torn inside, intrinsically depressed and devitalized. He was a sad man. He never got over the tragic death of his first daughter in the ghetto of Kovno and the subsequent loss of his wife and second child. He was plagued by horrible dreams that brought him back to the terror of the camps. I remember being startled by the screams that came from my parents' bedroom. These became the familiar sounds that invaded many nights of my adolescent years. Markusha's nightmares woke him and he often found himself in a sweat and with his heart pounding. Then followed the reassuring sound of Mother's voice. She was trying to dissipate the fear, to dispel the shadows of the past and to guide him back to the present.

When we arrived in Israel in 1948, Markusha became a modest employee of a Bank where his mathematical talents and prodigious memory were put to some use. Luckily for him these were the pre-computer years and he had found employment. As time passed it became clear that the energy he had displayed in the immediate post-war milieu of Landsberg was all spent. My parents settled down to a quiet life in which Mother was the driving force. Markusha loved her, accepted her overpowering personality, and was most accommodating. Mother was totally dedicated to his needs, to the facade of their life, but she kept on nurturing, deep in herself, the feeling that tying herself to him might have been a mistake. There was a gap of seventeen years between their ages. This difference became more and more obvious with the passage of time. Shortly before her death Mother confessed these feelings to me. I had always suspected them. Who knows if she had ever admitted them to herself before. My parents had been considered an exemplary, loving couple and only I felt the claustrophobic effect of the life between their four walls.

My dream was to get away from them as soon as I finished my service in the Israeli army and had made enough money to go to Paris. I wanted to be on my own, to exploit my talents, to nourish my hopes, to conquer the world, to become "a name". I knew that I needed another father, or several other fathers, to serve me as role models. I was an ambitious young man and I had to look for them elsewhere.

In the late 1960's, Markusha started to die. More exactly, the part of him that did not die in the ghetto and in the camp, the part that somehow kept him with us, started to wane. Today we would speak of an Alzheimer-like haze. But in those years a clear diagnosis was difficult. Between the travels that mother forced him to undertake, her dinners that were supposed to cheer him up, my successful career and my children who were meant to give him pleasure, floated his unobtrusive presence, Markusha with his gentle smile, his dignified composure. It took me some time to grasp how excruciating the effort to hide his failing health must have been for this cultured man. The remains of his extraordinary intelligence disoriented even the doctors, from whom he tried to hide his humiliating condition.

This situation did not continue for long. At a certain point Markusha lost control over the last remains of reality. He took me for the accountant of his glass factory in pre-war Lithuania and started to speak to me in Russian. He never realized that Mother died suddenly of a galloping cancer at age sixty and that he was a widower for a second time. The fog of his mind protected him from an awareness that might have been too much to bear.

It was Markusha's drifting away that led me to my "Chess-land" paintings. I tried to imagine the inner spaces of his structured world, which was governed by rational rules that had become in his youth the underlying source of his certitudes. I then thought about the cataclysmic forces that swept through him

in the black years of the Holocaust and all the havoc and destruction that came with them. I translated these forces into images of a world of chess after the universal flood, when hardly anything remained intact.

Markusha lingered for another year in a "home" where every patient looked to him as a potential bridge partner and he called every nurse Mitia, my Mother's name. He survived her by an entire year.

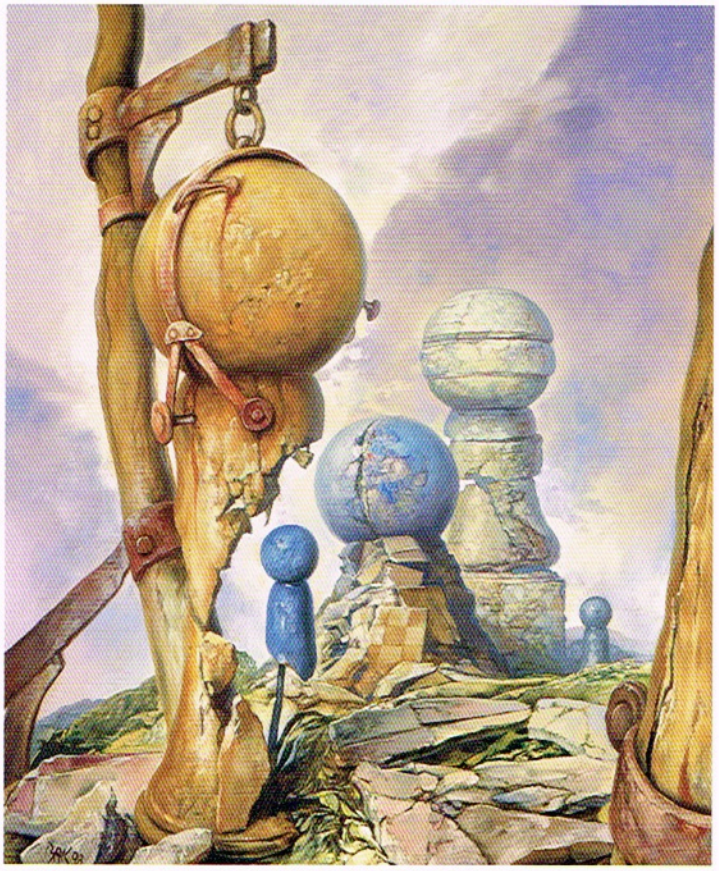
The Chess paintings, done in the early seventies were a clear tribute to Markusha's memory and to the tragic death of his mind. The ones included in this book are a continuation of that very journey into the old, familiar spaces of the former paintings, spaces that continue to surprise me with their diversity of possibilities. It is fascinating, for me, to explore their hidden riches. I keep examining a world where things disintegrate, with the intent of seizing the moment before it is too late and all proof is lost. I think of Markusha and of his departure.

I wish I could have told him, or maybe it is my way of telling him now, how sorry I am that I never opened for him the space of my lost father. Nor have I ever dared to invade the space of his lost children, since the wound that they left in him was sacred territory. We were, after all, a typical family of survivors, living with our much too present ghosts, in an arrangement of civilized tolerance. There was a lot of love among us, but we were at pains to deal with it properly.

I guess that my being, at present, of an age close to Markusha's at the time when he started to drift away, helps me finally to talk to him, man to man, and to tell him how dearly he is enshrined in my memory. This book is for him.

– Samuel Bak
Weston, MA
November 1998

Revised,
September 1999



2. *Study for Greatness,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 18 x 15"

3. *Auxiliary Help,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 18 x 15"

4. *Group Power,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 39¼ x 32"

5. *Passing Thoughts*, 1998 / Oil on canvas 24 x 48"

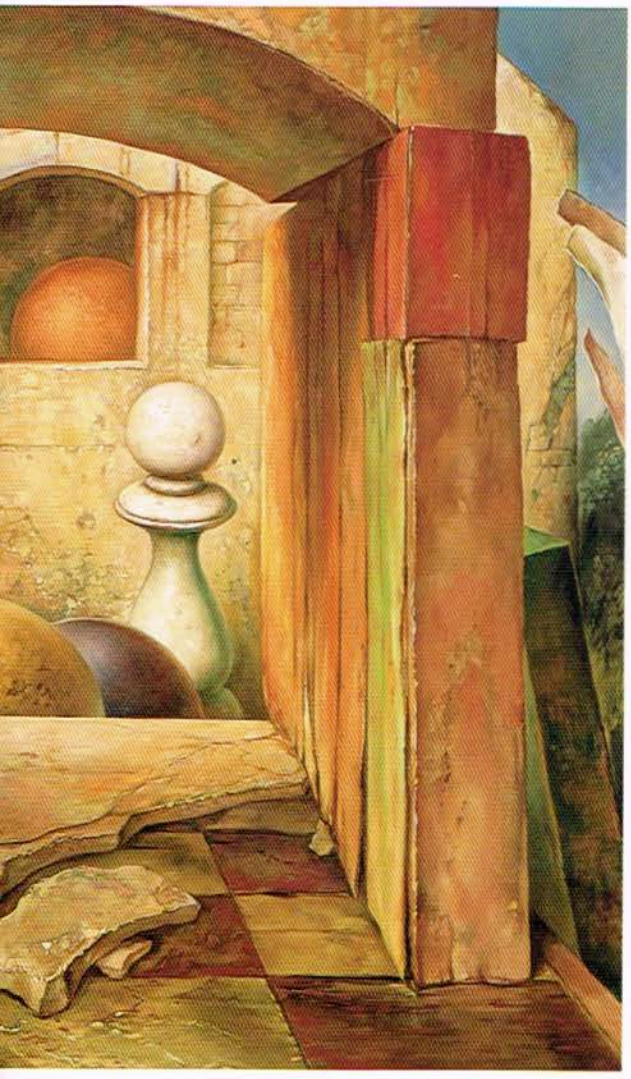
6. *Second Revolution in the Middle Game*, 1998 / Oil on canvas 34 x 50"

7. *Stormy Passing,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 22 x 26¼"

8. *On the Edge*, 1998 / Oil on canvas 39 x 32"

9a. *Messengers of Lost Prophecies* (left panel), 1998 / Oil on canvas 32¾ x 26¾"

9b. *Messengers of Lost Prophecies* (center panel), 1998 / Oil on



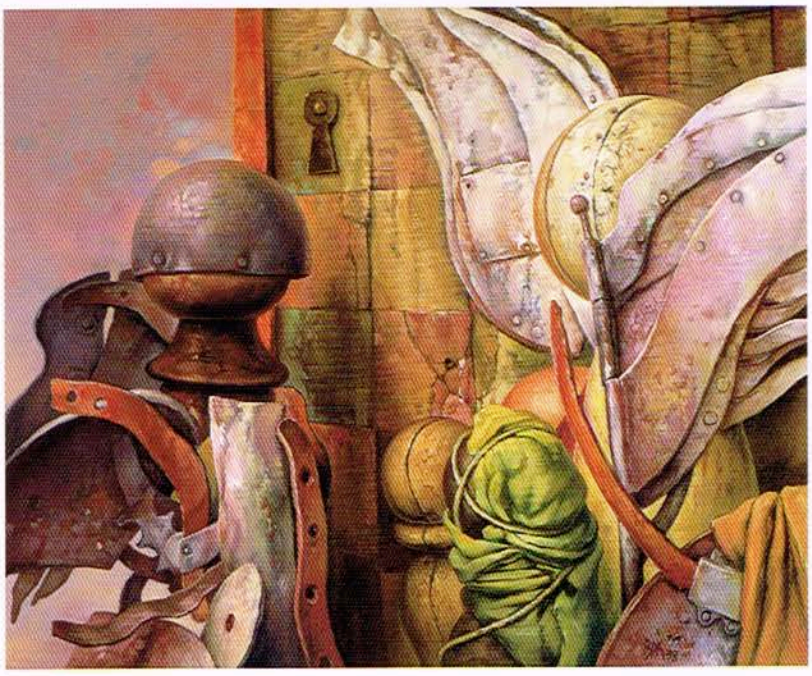
32¹/₄ x 39¹/₄"

9c. *Messengers of Lost Prophecies* (right panel), 1998 / Oil on canvas 32¹/₄ x 26¹/₄"

10. *Underground II*, 1997 / Oil on canvas 34 x 50¼"

11. *The Valley of the Kings*, 1998 / Oil on canvas 39 x 32"

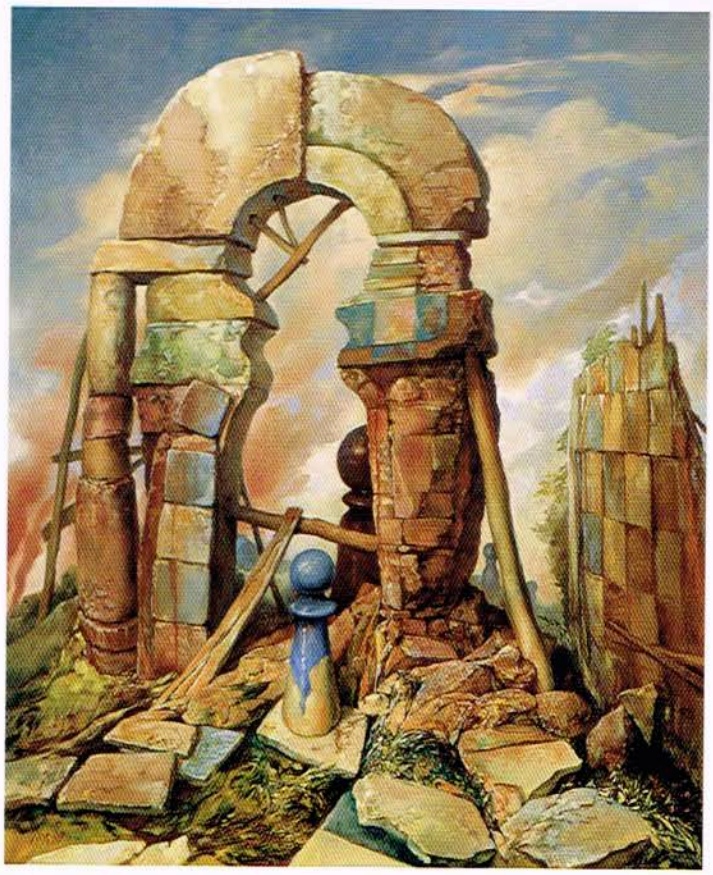
12. *Distant Fire*, 1998 / Oil on canvas 32 x 39"



13. *Messengers' Corner*, 1998 / Oil on canvas 15 x 18"

14. *Red Knight*, 1998 / Oil on canvas 12 x 8"

15. *Discarded Territory,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 22¼ x 26"



16. *Arch of Triumph,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 22¼ x 18"

17. *Small Arch,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 12¼ x 8"

SAMUEL BAK

1933 Born 12 August in Vilna, Poland.
1940-44 Under German occupation: ghetto, work-camp, refuge in a monastery.
1942 First exhibition of drawings in the ghetto Vilna.
1945-48 Displaced Persons camps in Germany; studied painting in Munich.
1948 Emigrated to Israel.
1952 Studied at the Bezalel Art School, Jerusalem.
1953-56 Army service.
1956-59 Lived in Paris. Studied at the "Ecole des Beaux-Arts."
1959-66 Lived in Rome; 1966-74 in Israel; 1974-77 in New York City; 1977-80 in Israel; 1980-84 in Paris; 1984-93 in Switzerland.
1993 Moved to Weston, Massachusetts.

SELECTED SOLO GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

Galleria Schneider - 1959, 1961, 1965, 1966.
Galleria Liguria - 1963.
Gordon Gallery, Tel Aviv - 1966.
Modern Art Gallery, Jaffa - 1968.
Pucker Safrai-1969, 1972, 1975, 1979, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991.
Hadassah "K" Gallery, Tel Aviv - 1971, 1973, 1978.
Aberbach Fine Art, New York - 1974, 1975, 1978.
DeBel Gallery, Jerusalem - 1978, 1980.
Galerie Levy, Hamburg - 1980.
Kallenbach Fine Art, Munich - 1981, 1983, 1984, 1987.
Soufer Gallery, New York - 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1997.
Galerie Carpentier, Paris - 1988.
Galerie Marc-Richard, Zurich - 1990.
Galerie de la Cathedrale, Fribourg - 1991, 1992.
Galerie Picpus, Montreux - 1991, 1992.
Pucker Gallery, Boston - 1993, 1995, 1996, 1998.
Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA - 1998
George Krevsky Fine Art, San Francisco, CA - 1998

SELECTED MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

Bezalel Museum, Jerusalem - 1963.
Bronfman Center, Montreal, Québec - 1970.
Rose Museum, Brandeis, Waltham, MA - 1976.
Heidelberg Museum - 1977.
Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn - 1978.
University of Haifa, Israel - 1978.
Kunstverein Braunschweig - 1980.
Stadtgalerie Bamberg, Villa Dessauer - 1988.
Koffler Gallery, Toronto Ontario - 1990.
Dürer Museum, Nuremberg - 1991.
Jüdisches Museum, Stadt Frankfurt am Main-1993
Hebrew Union - Jewish Institute of Religion, NY - 1994.
Janice Charach Epstein Museum, W. Bloomfield, MI- 1994.
Spertus Museum, Chicago, IL - 1995.
Mizel Museum of Judaica, Denver, CO - 1995.
Rosen Museum Gallery, Boca Raton, FL - 1996.
Holocaust Museum Houston & B'Nai B'Rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum, Washington, D.C. - 1997.
Lamont Gallery, Phillips Exeter, Exeter, NH - 1997.
Panorama Museum, Bad Frankenhausen, Germany - 1998
"Witness and Legacy", Traveling Group Exhibition in North America - 1995 - present. (Group Show).

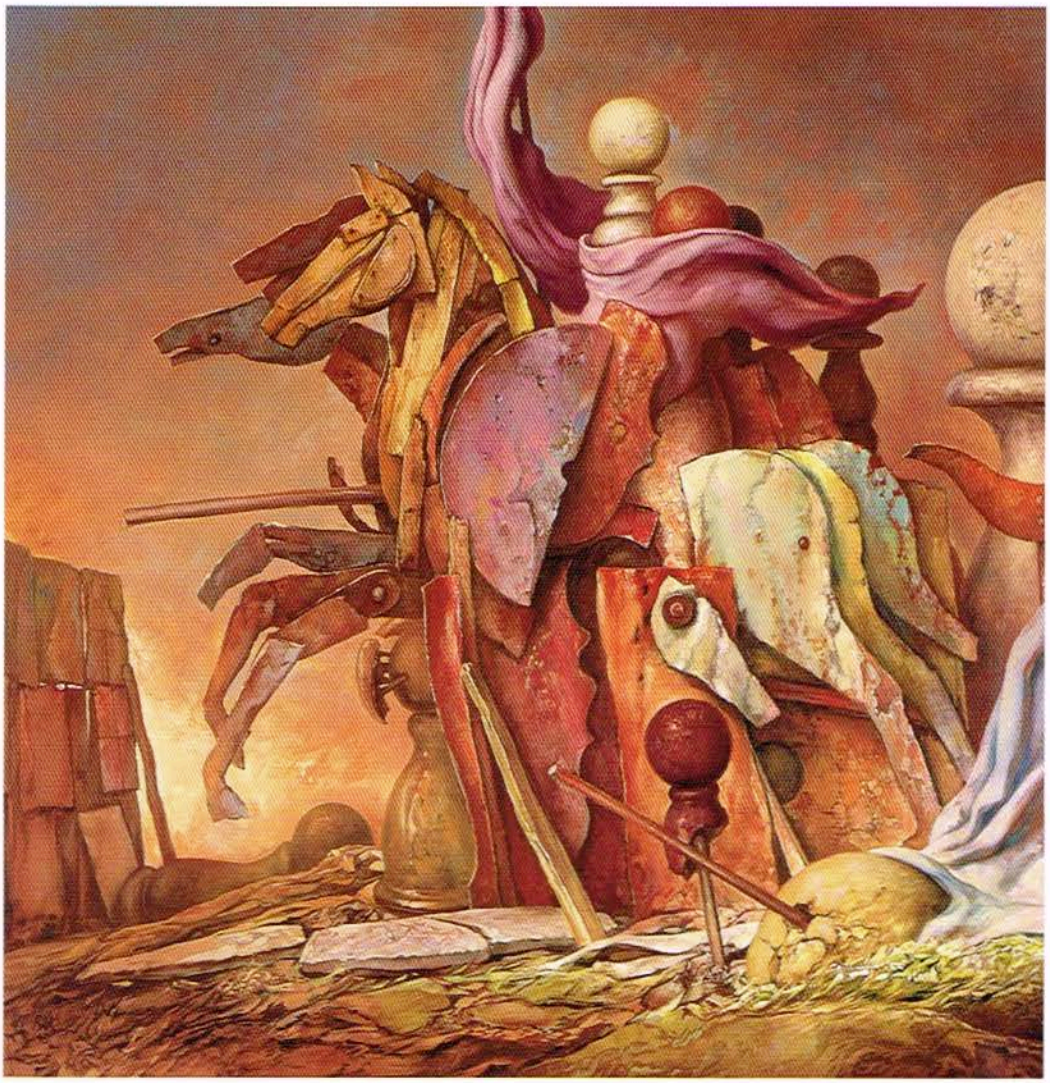
PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Boston Public Library, Boston, MA
DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA
Dürer House, Nuremberg.
F.L. Loeb Museum, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY
Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg.
German Parliament, Bonn.
Hobart & William Smith College, Geneva, NY
Holocaust Museum Houston, Houston, TX
Hood Museum, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
Imperial War Museum, London, UK
Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
Jewish Museum, New York, NY
Kunstmuseum, Bamberg.
Municipality of Nuremberg.
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
National Museum of Lithuania, Vilnius.
Panorama Museum, Bad Frankenhausen, Germany
Philips-Exeter Academy, Exeter, NH
Rose Museum, Brandeis, Waltham, MA
University of Haifa, Israel.
Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel.
Yad Vashem Museum, Jerusalem.
Vaud State, Switzerland.
Jüdisches Museum, Stadt Frankfurt am Main, Germany

SELECTED MONOGRAPHS/BOOKS

The Game Continues: Samuel Bak & Lawrence Langer. Pucker Art, Boston and Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1999.
Chess as Metaphor In the Art of Samuel Bak, Jean Louis Cornuz. Boston & Montreux, 1991.
Samuel Bak: The Past Continues, Samuel Bak and Paul T. Nagano. David R. Godine, Boston, 1988.
Landscapes of Jewish Experience, Lawrence Langer. University Press of New England, 1997.

Images reproduced in this catalogue are taken from the recently published volume on the art of Samuel Bak, *The Game Continues.* The book is eighty-eight pages and contains fifty-five color reproductions, along with a Memoir by the artist and an interpretive essay by Professor Lawrence L. Langer. It is available through the Pucker Gallery.



18. *Horsepower,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 26¼ x 26"

19. *Taken for a Ride,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 20 x 20"

20. *Attack,* 1998 / Oil on canvas 20 x 20"

Design: Samuel Bak and Jennifer Bennett Editor: Jeanne Gressler Photography: Andy Abrahamson
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5 February – 1 March 2000

21. *Sheltering Myths*, 1998 / Oil on canvas 20⅛ x 26⅛"

Public Opening and Book Signing:
5 February 2000, 3 – 6 p.m.
The artist and the author
Lawrence L. Langer will be present

In conjunction with:
the WITNESS AND LEGACY EXHIBITION
at the DeCordova Museum,
Lincoln, MA
18 December 1999 – 12 March 2000

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